

Hello.

My name is Laissa Jemea and I am a domestic violence survivor and mother of 2. I'm here to ask for help for children who have mental health issues that interfere with their academic work. Statistics show that exposure to trauma at a young age has the capacity to escalate mental health issues. I am here to ask you to do more to help these children. My oldest daughter is in high school. Given her difficult early childhood, coupled with the sudden restrictions of Covid, we now find ourselves in a whirlwind of mental health issues. Statistics show an increase in mental health issues post Covid generally, and the impact on children of color is even greater, making an uphill battle for so many children in our community. My own child's mental health issues have manifested as various forms of anxiety and depression. They are at times so severe that it's nearly impossible for her to attend school.

I am asking today that you designate someone to help to help parents dealing with challenges requiring individual education programs (IEP). Although in our case, we've received an IEP, I find that it's just "paper" support. My child has been in school online for much of this school year. and every time we attempt entry into school, she's left to fend for herself. Although there's an IEP, her teachers barely acknowledge it or know about it. Furthermore, she's supposed to restart school without a clear reentry plan, and just jump back into the flow of school mid-year without knowing what her peers have been learning. She's on medication and at best, unable to focus and without additional support like an aide, how is she supposed to navigate? Despite the 3 or 4 IEP meetings we have had, it seems nothing concrete happens beyond a paper notice of the meeting with plans that don't go anywhere.

I want to work on the issue of how to assist our children with challenges and how to make the best of the opportunities MCPS does offer. They can't become functioning adults without this help. .

Thank you!